

This bill provides over \$397 billion in discretionary budget authority, including \$10 billion in reserve funding for the Department of Defense, and is largely consistent with the agreed upon overall funding level. My original budget request, made a year ago, asked for the War on Terror reserve. I had separately agreed to endorse new funds for election reform, a bill that was passed months after my budget was submitted.

Unfortunately, the Congress chose to circumvent the spending limit for FY 2003 by borrowing \$2.2 billion in funding from FY 2004. This action must be corrected by adjusting both the 2004 budget allocations and appropriations, and holding advance appropriations constant with the level enacted last year. I will ask the Leadership to ensure this happens.

This bill allocates over \$53 billion in total Education funding. The Congress provided increases for many of my high-priority programs, including programs for reading, disadvantaged students, special education, and Pell Grants.

The bill also includes \$3.3 billion in unrequested drought and other assistance, which is only minimally offset by real reductions in existing farm spending. Ninety-five percent of purported savings are scheduled to come several years from now, after

the expiration of today's farm bill, and may prove illusory.

Most troublesome, H.J. Res. 2 falls nearly \$1 billion short of my request for State and local law enforcement and emergency personnel, and in particular underfunds terrorism preparedness for first responders. I requested \$3.5 billion for the First Responders Initiative. The bill, however, provides only \$1.3 billion for this purpose. Meanwhile the bill provides \$2.2 billion for existing State and local grant programs, which are not directly related to higher-priority terrorism preparedness and prevention efforts. This is unsatisfactory, and my Administration will use every appropriate tool available to ensure that these funds are directed to the highest priority homeland security needs.

This belated agreement to last year's appropriations process is not perfect, but it underscores the need to move quickly on this year's priorities outlined in my 2004 budget request. I look forward to working with the Congress to continue funding the war on terror, strengthening our economy, and protecting the homeland.

GEORGE W. BUSH

NOTE: H.J. Res. 2, approved February 20, was assigned Public Law No. 108-7. An original was not available for verification of the content of this statement.

Letter to Congressional Leaders Transmitting a Report on United States Individuals Involved in the Antinarcotics Campaign in Colombia *February 20, 2003*

Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. President:)

Pursuant to section 3204(f), title III, chapter 2 of the Emergency Supplemental Act, 2000 (the "Act"), as enacted in the Military Construction Appropriations Act, 2001, Public Law 106-246, I am providing a report prepared by my Administration

that provides "the aggregate number, locations, activities, and lengths of assignment for all temporary and permanent U.S. military personnel and U.S. individual civilians retained as contractors involved in the antinarcotics campaign in Colombia."

In so doing, I note and appreciate the continued strong bipartisan support given to U.S. programs assisting Colombia in the Act and elsewhere.

This report is classified because of force protection considerations and the high level of terrorist threat in Colombia. However, the aggregate numbers given below are unclassified.

The report indicates that as of January 13, 2003, the end of this reporting period, there were 208 temporary and permanent U.S. military personnel and 279 U.S. civilians retained as individual contractors in

Colombia involved in supporting Plan Colombia. This report further indicates that during November and December 2002, and January 2003, these figures never exceeded the ceilings established in section 3204(b) of the Act, as amended.

Sincerely,

GEORGE W. BUSH

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to J. Dennis Hastert, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Richard B. Cheney, President of the Senate.

The President's Radio Address *February 22, 2003*

Good morning. This week, Members of the House and Senate will return to Washington with a full agenda to address, from strengthening our economy to reforming health care, to protecting national security.

On the Senate side, there is a crucial item of business that has been delayed for too long. We face a vacancy crisis in the Federal courts, made worse by Senators who block votes on qualified nominees. These delays endanger American justice. Vacant Federal benches lead to crowded court dockets, overworked judges, and longer waits for Americans who want their cases heard. Regional appeals courts have a 15-percent vacancy rate, and filings in those courts reached an alltime high again last year.

Since taking office, I have sent to the Senate 34 qualified mainstream nominees for the Federal courts of appeals. To date, only half of them have received a vote in the Senate, and 12 of the remaining 17 nominees have been waiting more than a year for a floor vote.

It is my responsibility to submit judicial nominations. It is the Senate's responsibility to conduct prompt hearings and an up-or-

down floor vote on all judicial nominees. Yet a handful of Democratic Senators, for partisan reasons, are attempting to prevent any vote at all on highly qualified nominees.

One of these nominees is Miguel Estrada, my selection for the DC Court of Appeals. I submitted his nomination in May of 2001, and Miguel Estrada has been waiting ever since. That's almost 2 years, and that's a disgrace.

Miguel Estrada's credentials are impeccable. He has served in the Justice Department under Presidents of both political parties. He's argued 15 cases before the U.S. Supreme Court, and he has earned the American Bar Association's highest mark, a unanimous rating of "well-qualified."

Miguel Estrada is an exceptional nominee for the Federal bench. He also has a remarkable personal story. He came to America from Honduras as a teenager, speaking little English. Within a few years, he had graduated with high honors from Columbia College and Harvard Law School. Miguel Estrada then served as a law clerk to Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy, as a Federal prosecutor in